

CHRISTIANITY and CRISIS

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A Christian Journal of Opinion

Let Nothing You Dismay

As the earth turns and the days shorten toward Christmas, there settles into suburbia a kind of grim panic and a busy weariness whose spirit is a sad denial of what Advent should be. The contradiction between the mystery and solemn holiness of the Incarnation, on the one hand, and the tawdry commercial barter, the shrill hilarity of holiday, and the calculated exchanges of plastic and chrome, on the other, tempt us to cynicism about the whole ceremony.

As we hurry through store aisles or drive homeward through clogged streets, we are quick to note some new desecration of the sacred conceived by the ad-man, some new manipulation of generous sentiment by some anonymous consumer engineer. Christmas has been spoiled, we say. It is worse this year than ever before. How can we possibly sing the songs of innocence or celebrate the ancient rites of rapture and prayer and adoration of the Child amid all this truck and racket?

The irony is deepened by the contradiction between the events of the day and the original Event that we turn to honor. The nuclear stalemate, the eruptions abroad, the mounting crises of tomorrow appear to bear no impact of the power and spirit of Him who came speaking peace to the nations. So our turning to Christmas is a retreat to a sanctuary, safe from all of Monday's hard decisions, rather than to a vantage-point from which Christian decisions can be discerned.

The Scrooge in us is further encouraged by a nostalgia for the way it used to be in grandmother's day, or so we think. We picture the simple, rural, pristine purity of some childhood Christmas long ago, when the world was secure and the relations

among men warm and trustworthy. This memory of a pretty Christmas, with clean white snow falling on the farmhouse in a stable 19th century culture, makes us grimace all the more at the present mockery.

It may be a consolation and corrective to such romanticism to be reminded that Christmas always has been so, and that indeed both the scandal and the surprise of the Incarnation lie right here, in the contradiction between the Light and the darkness into which it comes, as a "world which knew him not." The Word becomes flesh, but the flesh is always ugly and raw, unfit to receive the visitation.

Instead of pining for the security and serenity of a 19th century Christmas, we would do well to recall the lines written by Charles Kingsley in the middle of that century, which to him seemed so harsh:

*Oh, blessed day, which giv'st the eternal lie
To self, and sense, and all the brute within:
O, come to us, amid this war of life,
To hall and hovel, come; to all who toil,
In senate, shop, or study; and to those
Who, sundered by the wastes of half a world,
Ill-warmed, and sorely tempted, ever face
Nature's brute powers, and men unmanned to
[brutes.*

Or we may yearn for a Dickens Christmas, full of fun and plum-pudding, far removed from TV torpor. But we should remember the ugliness of the grinding poverty that Bob Cratchit suffered. If we of the 20th century desecrate the spirit of Christmas by affluence and gluttony, those of the 19th desecrated it with predatory economic cruelty. In either case, the ugliness of sin counters its own redemption.

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The darkness within which the Light shines changes its form from age to age, but it is a perennial darkness. The poets who sing of the Christmas event do so always from a poignant awareness of the shadows of their time that are newly dispelled by joy.

The most naïve form of this romanticism about past Christmases, and a petulance about this one, is the sentiment that thinks that the first Christmas must have been just lovely. There were no commercials. Only shepherds keeping watch, and wise men following a shining, God-sent star. Joseph and Mary, with mantle of blue, in silent adoration of her first-born.

Yet such nostalgia forgets that the Incarnation was not lovely at all. If ever the times were dark and ominous it was in the reign of Herod the tyrant. If ever there were unlikely persons to receive the Lord of Life, it was the illiterate, proletarian refugee family of Joseph and Mary. There was a foul smell in the stable, and a halo of sweat on Mary's head.

As the lines of Robinson Jeffers discern:

*Only an hour, only an hour
From wars and confusions turn away
To the islands of old time
When the world was simple and gay,
Or so we say,
And light lay the snow on the green holly,
The tall oxen knelt at midnight.*

*Caesar and Herod shared the world
Sorrow over Bethlehem lay.
Iron the empire, brutal the time,
Dark was that first Christmas day,
Light lay the snow on the mistletoe berries
And the ox knelt down at midnight.**

Gladness can be restored to us, the joy of God's salvation, by the remembrance that the Incarnation happens again today *within* the crass and the commercial, as first it happened in a most unsuitable and outlandish place and time, centuries ago.

W. B.

KENNEDY AND THE EXPERTS

THE READER of these lines is, as *The New Yorker* recently said, a very advanced fellow, living up there in the middle of next week; he probably knows much more about the composition

* From the poem, "Two Christmas-Cards," copyright 1941 by Robinson Jeffers. Reprinted from *Be Angry at the Sun and Other Poems*, by permission of Random House, Inc.

of the new Administration than is known at this writing.

He may already know, for example, which Cabinet positions—if any—the Kennedy people have decided to give to the conservatives and Republicans: whether the Treasury, or Defense, or something else. From this he may be able to tell something about the course of the Administration to come, such as whether its concessions to the conservatives will sometimes be made in the economic field or not. It will be interesting to see, for example, the placing of such a person as C. Douglas Dillon.

But even without such advanced knowledge as you possess, gentle reader, we can say that the Kennedy administration will be an administration in which expert knowledge of the legislative fields and of the social sciences will have an important place. Mr. Kennedy's own intellectual predilections and the advisers around him make this plain.

Men who have worked with the Kennedy people on labor legislation, for example, report the impressive level of careful, specialized knowledge that both the staff and Mr. Kennedy himself possess and—equally important—that they recognize and respect. Economists, political scientists and others who have had contact with Mr. Kennedy have usually come away much impressed and satisfied at the kind of responsiveness that they discovered in him and his camp. Perhaps the best phrase to indicate the quality of the Kennedy group is "technical excellence."

The respect for technical excellence and concrete, expert knowledge expected from this Administration will be quite a different thing from the "best brains" whom Mr. Eisenhower was always promising to assemble. His idea of a "best brain" was George Humphrey or Charles Wilson—that is, a Big Man in a Practical Line.

Mr. Kennedy's company may differ somewhat even from the "Brain Trust" of the early Roosevelt days, to which so many comparisons are now being made. This will be a less "ideological" group, more precise, academic and narrowly specialized, reflecting the advances—or anyway, changes—in social science in the intervening period. Maybe this is just a difference in the respective generations; or maybe there is a further difference that springs from the particular characteristics of this man and group. Probably the Kennedy people will differ slightly even from those that might have been expected around a Hubert Humphrey, as a

modern representative of the New Deal tradition.

In Mr. Kennedy himself and in the people upon whom he draws, there is a high level of intelligence, a firm respect for facts, an ability in precise discrimination, an inclination toward the analytic operation of the mind, not much interest in broad, vague "philosophical" matters, a lawyer-like or perhaps a rather legislator-like, case-by-case approach: perhaps one can describe it as "positivist" or "technical" in temper. Mr. Kennedy himself is the kind of man (unlike the predecessors in his own tradition and even some of his competitors in the present) who could win those TV debates with his impressive grasp of specifics. We will now have an administration more or less built on that inclination.

The reservations that many who read this journal will have about a certain absence of depth and vision and overarching moral and philosophical ideas may or may not prove to be well taken. It is a little hard for those of us who deal continually in the grand ideas of theological and philosophical discourse to admit that, for some purposes, these ideas are a little too grand, and that it is better to have somebody who knows more precisely what he is talking about.

But, on the other hand, one can say that, at least at the level of the Presidential leadership, it is important that there be not only technical excellence (which is a great good) but also a large, guiding moral substance, and an articulation of the broader meaning of our time and of our action. Maybe that will come.

The question about the Kennedy administration is really a question about a whole generation and group of intellectual workers in the United States. We now will see whether this generation—the "policy sciences" generation, one might say—can produce the greatness that this moment in history requires.

W. L. M.

LAITY AND CHRISTIAN VOCATION

WE ARE publishing in this issue an article by Cameron P. Hall on "The Social Irrelevance of the Local Church." It raises questions that need to be faced, questions that are seldom raised with so much frankness by responsible leaders of the Church.

Mr. Hall has been for many years the executive of the Department of Church and Economic Life of the National Council of Churches and has been able to observe the situation throughout the country. He is also one of the best informed authorities on

the thinking that has been done in this country and abroad about the role of the laity.

The great distance between the outlook of the national or ecumenical church bodies and that of local churches is often emphasized. Mr. Hall relates this to inadequate conceptions of the roles of the minister and of the laymen in the local church, roles that are seldom even examined. The ingrowing character of the local church, except for conventionalized denominational channels of giving and action, is one result of the philosophy of the lay activity dominant in American Christianity, which emphasizes work for the Church within the walls of the church.

There has been a strikingly different development of thought about the role of laymen in the European churches since the war. This development stresses the function of the layman and churchman in his work in the world rather than "in church." There are perhaps two reasons for this difference that need attention along with the considerations discussed by Mr. Hall.

One is the fact that the American churches are dependent upon the financial support of their laymen. This fact has gained great momentum, resulting in a habit of giving for missionary and other enterprises of the larger Church, but also leading to an enormous development of the equipment of the local church. In many ways, this is constructive, but it is in part an expression of the self-centeredness of the local church.

The other factor in American life is that we have never been forced by history to re-examine our culture and our way of life as has been the case in many European countries. (Our racial mores are an important exception to this.) The Church is dominated here by the same complacency about the culture and especially about the whole environment of the economic activities of its members as is the nation at large.

Europe went through hell, and at least a minority of churchmen took a fresh look at their culture and institutions, and especially at the ethos and assumptions of various professions and economic occupations. There has been no such critical re-examination here of the things we have long taken for granted. Thus Church and world fit together quite easily, and few people ask disturbing questions about what any responsible person is doing in his daily work or as a citizen. For Christian vocation, as generally understood, is merely to do what you are already doing more faithfully, and to supplement it with support of the Church as an institution.

J. C. B.

Social Symbol and the Communication of the Gospel

AMOS N. WILDER

ONE CANNOT tell a man something unless, granted always that he is sane, he has some prior frame of reference in terms of which he can understand what is said. The loss of meaning today, at least the pluralism and relativity of meanings, is such that it is a real question whether the Christian witness can tell men anything.

Modern art is difficult not because it is, as such, bad art but because our world is full of incoherence. The good artist, nevertheless, identifies and locates meaning in the situation by getting behind the disorder and finding a deeper coherence and meaningfulness to which he can speak. As a by-product he also helps to reconcile the more superficial fragmentariness and strife of tongues.

...there is a dark
Inscrutable workmanship that reconciles
Discordant elements...

The question of communicating the Gospel today has two aspects. The more familiar aspect is that of how we come to terms with ancient imagery. Much of the discussion of demythologizing revolves about this side of the matter. The emphasis here lies on the question of *what* is communicated. What was (and is) the Gospel and what was the relation to it of the then contemporary symbolic vehicles?

The other aspect, perhaps less fully explored, is that of the hearer, the man to whom the Gospel is communicated, especially today: what if any frame of reference does he have, what receptive resources or antennae for responding to the Gospel, even granted our readiness to demythologize and translate? Does the average man today have a world-picture of any kind, or an apperception-mass to which any kind of significant message can be addressed and in terms of which it can be stated? Is it enough to say that every human being by definition has an existential or moral capacity for response to the Word?

Can we not say, to begin with, that the discussion has tended to agreement on one point? Given man's total make-up, the communication we have in mind cannot be in cerebral or merely dogmatic terms, although it must always recognize the valid

accessory role of theology. Communication of this kind of meaning and reality is a symbolic affair, and the necessary cognitive and dogmatic element is carried in the plastic formulations. The early Christian kerygmatic formula—the baptismal confessions, the liturgical and hymnic declarations—carried the witness, the revelation, in imagery that had had a long cultural history and significance.

There are three things to say about this. In the first place, this understanding of communication is illuminated for us by modern social psychology. We recognize that groups live on and find their sense of identity and cohesion in images, archetypes, mythos. Their sense of meaning, of orientation in existence, their incentives and vitality, are immediately dependent upon their "available past," and this comes to them very largely in the form of pictorial models and ceremonies. The nourishing roots of the security and vigor of the present come from a deeper level than logic or conscious intellect. They come from impulses mediated through significant pictures, paradigms, emblems, heroes, flags, all of which in one way or another dramatize a revelatory history or histories. If the vision of life that is held comes from the past in such media, any new such vision presumably must be similarly mediated.

Identity in Symbols

All this is true not only of the group but also of the individual. Men individually are, as it were, little bundles of explosive matter under control by social habit; they are deceptively composed and urbane little bombs of instinct and emotion and imagination, ordinarily under a controlled release. Any significant impact on them will be in terms of their make-up, and this means dynamic language.

The second thing to say, to avoid misunderstanding, is that we must recognize in men also some *personal* core of creaturely existence, what we can best call the heart. Apart from whatever pre-rational, dynamic character may be theirs, there is also in greater or lesser degree a conative, voluntary, moral center existing in them, and in this respect they are responsive to direct inter-personal address, challenge, invitation, rebuke.

This existential center or lever of freedom in

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men, however, is inseparably related to their vitalities as organized in cultural patterns, loyalties, values. Thus the only way to reach their hearts is through their cultural make-up, and this requires culturally significant symbol. We have, therefore, a warning here not only against cerebral or abstractly dogmatic ways of communication but also against de-culturized existential address. There is no naked existential selfhood that can be addressed by a non-plastic *kerygma*.

Not "Poetry"

The third thing to say is this. When we emphasize the role of plastic, dramatic language in Christian communication, we should not be charged with a shallow aestheticism. We are not proposing to save men by "poetry." To illustrate from New Testament times: if we speak of the imaginative character of early Christian eschatology we do not merely mean that Jesus and his followers were offering rhetorical persuasions of the order of dreams and compensations.

When we insist on the mythical mentality and the visionary and mimetic frame of mind of much New Testament religion or of later Christian revivals, the "realistic theologian" today shies away from the idea because he thinks we are dangerously confusing the Gospel with Eros, whether a religious romanticism or pagan sacramentalism. It is probably true that some of the interest in religious drama, dance or pageant in the churches today and some of the interest in capturing the popular arts for the Church reflect a thinking that is theologically questionable.

The misunderstanding lies at this point. The cardinal Christian imagery of the beginnings—eschatology, ecclesiology, Christology—was not, as we say, "idealistic" or "inspirational" or "mere poetry," just as it was not dryly dogmatic. It had a greater vitality than either view. The images of Messiah, Lord, people, body, New Jerusalem, etc. had cultural-sociological roots of immediate concrete relevance. The imaginative symbolism of early Christianity was not a free-floating complex of ancient poetry but serious socially-rooted mythos that carried meaning and orientation for the individual group in its total living.

The Hellenistic man found genuine meaning and liberation in the gnostic mythos because it spoke to his actual cultural condition and not just to his timeless soul. The Christian message challenged the same man more radically but still through the images in terms of which he under-

stood himself and his world. And these images were not fictions or "idle myths" but imaginative transcripts of social realities.

A Negative and a Positive Answer

Some theologians, though fewer today, seem to take it for granted that if we undress the New Testament message with respect to its apocalyptic and gnostic garb we have liberated the Gospel. Others recognize that we have to provide significant contemporary symbolic expression. But there is still the question as to what mythos or categories have any general meaningfulness today.

Rudolf Bultmann and Ernst Fuchs are not at all unaware of this problem of contemporary man and his conditioning. Hermeneutics is defined by them in terms both of text and of hearing, of speaker and listener. Fuchs indeed sees *Sprache*, or speech, in its quasi-magic aspect of world-making (on the analogy of the spell), and recognizes that it has no real meaning except where it creates community and is repeated or rehearsed by the community.

The question remains, however: in what respect do we recognize the readiness or preparation of contemporary man for the Gospel, taking account of his de-personalization and de-humanization? We seem to have two answers. One answer, which we may call the negative one, is that of the existentialists. Bultmann and his followers are very much concerned with the problem of modern man as determined by his cultural situation. Our scientific and technological outlook has exploded the mythology of Scripture, but more than that the modern situation has dissolved *all* inherited securities.

This negative situation provides the opportunity for an existentialist message and its meaningfulness. It is because men are a-culturized that they can hear an a-cultural Gospel. It is because the horizontal dimension of meaning is lost that a perpendicular revelation is relevant. So far as men still have residues of secular or secular-Christian values and idealisms, these are obstacles and idols. Thus we can appreciate precisely today the appeal of Christian existentialism, which discounts the use of symbolic communication and mythos in favor of direct challenge to men's ultimate freedom and their sense of bondage and anxiety.

The other answer, which we may call the positive one, urges that the Gospel, to be effective, must identify in men today not only their deprivation of meaning but also their continuing structures of meaning, and must appeal to these. We postulate

here an apperception-mass or readiness for understanding the Gospel defined by men's values, ideals and faiths, however secularized or shaken. We appeal even to disoriented modern men through the kind of symbol that is still meaningful to them and that can be used to make the Gospel, including its own inherited images, meaningful to them.

The case for this second alternative rests on the axioms that men live and make sense of the world, so far as they do, by symbol, and that the wholeness of the human being includes his cultural make-up. Man in his concreteness can only be addressed in cultural media, that is by a language that has served for social meaningfulness. Where such symbol and its worldview and values have become identified with error, false idols or false securities, they must be purified, but we nevertheless use them as a springboard for a truer understanding. This is the way in which Christianity communicated itself in the Hellenistic world. The Gospel exploited the apperception-mass of paganism to win men. Where human pride and sin turned the existing myth and cult of paganism into demonic structures, there could then indeed only be conflict—the war of the myths. But even in this aspect the Christian witness engaged men's total life in all its cultural levels.

The Necessary Springboard

We get to the heart of the matter and its potential scandal if we suggest that modern man's cultural ideals, values, meanings—idealistic, romantic, scientific-rational—are the necessary apperception-mass, springboard, "available past," for understanding the Gospel today. Does the modern scientifically-minded agnostic, who holds on to some sort of sense in the existing collapse of meaning in terms of the "quest for truth" as he sees it, have to be disillusioned with this before he can grasp the Gospel? Does he have to be thrown back to zero to be in a position where the revelation can find entrance? We should distinguish between his idiom of meaningfulness and his pride. Men's imperfect and tentative wisdoms are not necessarily idols.

Or again, does the tradition of the American dream with its archetypes and images, granted all its romantic eschatology and eudaemonism and its secularized version of the Old Testament story of theocratic vocation, its march toward the Promised Land and world mission—does this social idealism and its vital semantic have to be totally rebuked? Does the appeal of the Gospel require

that we make a clean slate of all such human and cultural mythology or lived symbol?

The fact is that the German churches' traumatic experience with the demonic features of ethnic and nationalistic myth has pushed our thinking about such matters off balance. We are in danger of forgetting that the Gospel *does* have to do with men at the level of blood and soil just as it has to do with the individual in his somatic aspect. However misconstrued the components of the American dream may be, if we wish to harness what remains of healthfulness in the vitalities of our people we should not scorn or neglect the available Christian past that still operates in such forms in the lives of countless citizens and in many of our social patterns.

The *Sine Qua Non*

As the early Church wrestled with but exploited the socio-cultural myths of its world, so should we today. The American dream and its saga and mythos represent a vast reservoir of at least moral if not Christian potentiality. Appeal to it by a poet like Benét or a statesman like Woodrow Wilson suggests its relevance, though the dangers are evidently great. Our society being what it is, no theological or religious revival will be widely significant that does not speak to this aspect of American religious life, and not only in terms of repudiation.

By these two examples we have tried to make a case for the validity and necessity of historically rooted social symbol in the communication of the Gospel. One could of course reflect upon the *non*-social character of much of the most significant contemporary art and literature: the existential and private concern of the work of Kafka, Camus, Beckett, etc. Evidently the personal dilemma today is prominent. But is it not precisely the task of Christianity to identify the human problem as not only subjective, psychological, existential, but also as public and corporate?

The New Testament imagery of salvation, while it challenges the individual, is also social and public in character and has a radius that runs out from the local church through the world of men to the cosmic community. The Gospel cannot at any time be satisfied with a message to the individual in his ultimate choices, whether revivalistic or even at the most sophisticated levels of psychology or existentialism. It must challenge men in terms of their communal and socio-political creatureliness and relationships, and for this social symbols are the *sine qua non*.

The Social Irrelevance of the Local Church

CAMERON P. HALL

SAMUEL McCREA CAVERT has expressed concern that many local churches minister entirely "to the conscious needs and interests of their own members." He says that the local church "is raising no disturbing question as to what Christian stewardship means for the relation of the richest nation in the world to economically under-developed people. It is not making its members sensitive to the sub-Christian level of much of our economic and industrial life."

What to me is particularly arresting about this comment on American Protestantism is that it is related to the Church in its local manifestation. From where I sit, this description of our local churches seems widely, although by no means uniformly, applicable. However, my present interest is neither to measure nor to argue the extent to which this is true. Rather, it lies in an analysis of the major reasons and causes for whatever may be the degree of irrelevance of today's local churches to economic, social and political issues.

First, local churches, as a rule, find their program objectives in denominational objectives. Unfortunately, denominational pressures for Christian social concerns are still relatively marginal and weak. How weak they are is illustrated by the low priority the churches and denominations attach to a minister's social concerns and accomplishments. A minister's social effectiveness bears little reference to his professional status or advancement.

Second, the local church usually lacks an image of itself as a source of impetus for needed social change in community, national or international affairs. Instead, severally and corporately, its minister and members look inward, not outward. Does not the local church generally see its responsibility to be strong mainly in the things that make for institutional and organizational strength? Many local churches sincerely affirm that they are not preoccupied with themselves but are deeply committed to making Christ a living force in the community, nation and world. But when a statement of this kind goes beyond mere generalization, what follows is often fuzziness in thinking about the social process, untested beliefs about what

has happened, and wishful hoping about what will happen.

Now I am fully and gratefully aware of the great missionary outreach—at home and abroad—of local churches. Indeed, the scope and significance of this outreach is a compelling reason for tempering any description of the introverted character of the image that the local church has of itself. But, paradoxically, the missionary outreach tends to highlight the social irrelevance of the local church.

The missionary outreach focusses upon what the individual Christian *gives of his means* to people and causes; but along with this there can be and often is blindness to what the same individual himself *does as citizen and worker* in his community and occupation. Measured in terms of the needs of the world and the wealth of this nation, the missionary support of our churches is pitifully meager. Yet the emphasis on the giving of one's means is still far beyond any emphasis even imagined by the local church on the giving of one's life in terms of one's daily responsibilities and decisions as citizen and worker.

In each local church there are one or more groups that carry the concern of that church for its missionary outreach. The name varies, but in a few instances it is called appropriately the World Church Committee. I am urging that along with such a group each local church needs another that might be called the Church-in-the-World Committee, which would carry the concern of that church for the social, political and economic aspects of secular life.

Here too, the name is not the important matter. Perhaps it would help get to the need that such a group could meet by thinking of it as a Christian Citizenship and Christian Vocation Committee. It would help to make the lay members of the church aware (1) of issues in the community, nation and world concerning which they could use their influence as citizens, and (2) of issues in their own jobs and occupations concerning which they could use their influence as workers, no matter what their level of skill or position. Such a thrust would help its members, and hence the local church itself, grow in social relevance.

Third, few local churches have a program that is related to the citizenship and occupational roles of

Mr. Hall worked with the Federal Council of Churches prior to becoming Chairman of the Department of Church and Economic Life of the National Council of Churches. He helped produce the department's ten-volume "Series on the Ethics and Economics of Society."

their members. Even a cursory glance at the life and activities of a local church reveals little recognition that most adult members spend Monday through Saturday in their occupational involvements, that all of them are enmeshed in the consumer aspect of our economy, and that all bear the ultimate political responsibility that a democracy confers upon them as citizens.

In contrast, the life and program of most churches do register an awareness of two other roles of the man and woman in the pew. One role is in respect to the Church itself—as member, contributor, attendant, officer, teacher, etc. The only other role of the lay man or woman that the local church appears to recognize is that performed in the family and home—as mother or father, wife or husband.

I have been using the term “role,” which has a sociological reference; in this connection we can better speak of “vocation,” which carries a special aspect of our Christian heritage. How habitually the local church seems to exclude from its vision and program the citizenship and particular vocations of its members! Where do we find in programs of local churches recognition of their members as businessmen, industrialists, professional people, farmers, educators, labor leaders or legislators? Businessmen and industrialists are church members by the thousands—but where can you find a church approach or strategy in respect to them *as businessmen*? One reason so many local churches appear indifferent, superficial or at times even hostile toward labor unions is that locally they lack a specific approach to *those who are members and leaders of labor unions*.

Fourth, the local church, all too generally, lacks a functional relationship to today's major public and private groups and activities. The concept that dominates the pastoral function in the local church explains why this is so. The pastoral services of the local church are intended and expected to render help and inspiration to the sick, the bereaved, the troubled, the alcoholic, the lonely, and the wayward. These are the objects of its pastoral concern.

However, the vocational problems and decisions that the individual meets daily are considered by both pastor and lay member as *not* belonging within the exercise of the pastoral function. The layman rarely holds it against his pastor that he would not even understand what the layman was saying, and the pastor has been trained neither by his seminary nor by refresher courses to know what to do if his help were sought about a layman's

citizenship and occupational needs. I submit that this widespread separation of the pastoral function from the individual in respect to his place in the social structure of the community and the economy must lead to the social irrelevance of the local church itself.

Measures of Social Witness

Fifth, there is a tendency in many places to measure the social relevance of the local church by the social witness of its minister, especially in his preaching. This is in essence a form of clericalism, into which both clergy and laity fall. In this there is both a serious error and a dangerous pitfall. The implicit assumption that the social relevance of what a minister preaches serves to establish the social relevance of the local church itself leaves out of account the demands of Christian vocation on the part of the members of that church in factory and office, on the farm or on the road, in the school room or in party precinct headquarters.

Socially relevant preaching has a bearing on the vocational responsibility of the minister himself; but if his church is to be socially relevant, its members must express their vocational responsibilities in terms of their Monday-through-Saturday citizenship and occupational activities. To listen to socially relevant preaching by their minister can be and often is of help to those in the pew, but such preaching can also become an indulgence or even an escape from a probing and vigorous application of the layman's own vocational responsibility where he lives and works.

And lastly, the reason for a wide social irrelevance of the local church is found not only in those who are broadly conservative but also in those who are broadly liberal. In respect to the latter, may I presume to offer myself as the subject of a case history? I have always rejoiced when the churches, through denominational and church council judiciaries, have spoken out on social issues.

I have welcomed the opportunity to play any part at all in this process. This was true during the ten years I served as pastor of a church on New York's West Side. I was then chairman of the Synod of New York's Committee on Social Education and Action, and we could always be counted on to come up with a more, rather than less, controversial list of proposed pronouncements. I was also on the Federal Council of Churches' Industrial Relations Division, which at least once a year came forth with a statement. My point in

referring to these personal relationships in the official life of the churches is that during the same period I was doing nothing of any significance, apart from preaching, to help my church make itself and the lives of its members relevant to the great social issues in New York City, the United States, and the postwar world during the late Twenties and early Thirties.

Am I wrong in suggesting that this sort of schizophrenia is descriptive of many liberal pastors? They welcome the prophetic voice of the churches coming out of delegated assemblies; but, apart perhaps from their preaching, the life and activity of their local church is not significantly related to economic, social and political issues on which the Church as a whole has made pronouncements.

To stop here is to be open to the charge of being long on analysis and short on prescription. But I feel we need to see what the floor looks like under the rug if we are to be ready to admit that something needs to be done about the floor. I will only hint at a needed approach to making more local churches become more socially relevant.

We need to rethink the ministry of the ministers within the context of the total ministry of the church. The ministry of the local church is more than that of its minister; for his ministry must be viewed within the total ministry of his church, which includes the ministry of the laity as well. And within this inclusive ministry of the Church, the role of preaching by the ordained minister must be seen as rendering important but still limited help toward establishing the social relevance of the local church.

Just as the local church, in respect to family and home life, goes beyond being a preaching center and becomes a training and supporting fellowship for Christian living in the home, so must it also become a training and supporting fellowship for lay people, separately and together, helping them to act responsibly as Christians in their vocations as citizens and workers.

CHURCH NEWS AND NOTES

Against "Illusions" in Seeking Unity

Ferrara, Italy—Augustin Cardinal Bea, head of the Vatican Secretariat on Christian unity, has warned against "too many illusions" in seeking Christian unity, because it is "a task which will require much time, charity and patience."

"But all the same," the Cardinal told a meeting in Ferrara, Italy, "we must have the confidence which is based on prayer and on the fact that a constantly growing number of Christians of all

confessions are joining in the High Priestly prayer of Jesus *ut omnes unum sint* and are reminding themselves of Jesus' words, 'What is impossible to men is possible to God.'"

The Cardinal said that the Roman Catholic position in the quest for unity must be characterized by two attitudes. First, the Church must protect the Faith and give "the greatest care in safeguarding the complete integrity of Catholic dogma." Secondly, it must have "a readiness to understand and [show] genuine active charity towards the separated brethren."

He said the first of these attitudes is not a restriction of charity, "but rather the necessary guarantee that charity should remain authentic, i.e., absolutely loyal to Christ and to His Bride, the Church, by full acceptance of the Truth which Christ makes evident through the Church."

The secretariat was set up last spring to deal with relations with non-Roman Catholic Christians in preparation for the Second Vatican (Ecumenical) Council. Cardinal Bea, 79, a German-born member of the Jesuit order, was formerly rector of the Pontifical Biblical Institute in Rome and private confessor to the late Pope Pius XII.

Ecumenical Press Service

French Protestants On The Algerian War

Montbéliard, France—The Tenth Plenary Assembly of the French Protestant Churches has called for immediate resumption of negotiations on "as broad a base as possible" to seek a solution to the Algerian war, now in its seventh year.

The Assembly meeting in Montbéliard adopted by an overwhelming majority a statement which said that such negotiation should seek "an equitable status for all the communities which live together in Algeria, and a guarantee against all reprisals."

It said that if such negotiations should not reach a speedy conclusion, the necessity of involving outside mediators would become "inevitable."

The Assembly declared that the situation leads the churches to issue a mandate to President de Gaulle to appeal to Algerian leaders for proclamation of an early truce. It said that such a mandate should be issued if possible in cooperation with other French religious leaders.

The statement declared that the Algerian war has "divided our country, and...created barriers of misunderstanding between France and other countries of the world, especially those in Africa." At the same time in France, it said, it is producing a "moral and legal deterioration which is undermining the very concept of the State...which incites those who have been given power (administrative, military or police) to use it for subversive purposes."

The statement drew particular attention to the moral perplexities of youth who must fight in the war. It said that it is not possible to say that "loyalty consists in taking one single attitude," but

added that the Church "feels bound to state that refusal to obey the authorities, which today is developing into an illegal attitude, could not be justified unless the State were completely perverted."

It said the primary duty of those serving in the army in Algeria "difficult as it is, is to bear witness among their comrades and among the whole population to the reconciling Christ."

It said they "ought never to consent to the degradation, by moral and physical torture, of the men against whom they are fighting," even if their enemies have done so.

A section on conscientious objectors says that for these persons this position "seems to be the way to make a clear testimony" and assured them that the Assembly's member churches would continue to press for their legal recognition.

The statement is the second one on the Algerian conflict by French church officials in recent weeks. Last week the French Roman Catholic hierarchy issued a declaration which also condemns desertion and subversion and denounces acts of terrorism. *Ecumenical Press Service*

East German Pastoral Letter

Berlin, Germany—The Synod of the Evangelical Church of the Union (EKU), whose member churches include the majority of Protestants in East Germany, has authorized a pastoral letter calling upon clergy and parishoners to consider "obedience to the faith" before deciding to flee East Germany.

The pastoral letter, which will be read from the pulpits of all its East German member churches, will urge also that they take into account the importance of "... remaining united in one church."

The issuing of the letter was approved at a recent meeting of the Synod in Berlin—Weissensee following reports of a continued flow of refugees from the East across the West German borders.

Dr. Joachim Beckmann, EKU Council President, said the Synod had repeatedly stressed that "Protestants are not absolutely free to leave the place where God has placed them." In the present situation, he said, the Church must give Christian guidance in helping persons come to a decision about leaving their homes.

At the same time, he said, the East German Government must be urged to create the conditions in which the "fear, anxiety and pressure upon conscience" which result in the flights would be alleviated and Christians would be allowed freedom to practice their faith.

The church regulation which forbids pastors who have fled East Germany without permission of their church authorities was discussed at another meeting of West German church leaders last week.

Bishop Wilhelm Halmann, President of the Church of Kiel, told the Synod of the Evangelical-Lutheran Church of Schleswig-Holstein that the regulation has caused "great difficulty."

While pastors who flee are legally recognized as political refugees, he said, the West German church cannot give them employment until their case has been decided by East German authorities, a procedure which often takes several years.

"The Eastern churches must ensure that the dikes do not burst," he declared. "But on the other hand, the people who feel themselves menaced usually do not have time to inform their church authorities. At the same time, if a pastor who feels threatened confides his intention of fleeing, he legally implicates his confidant. There are cases in which the wife can no longer stand [the situation], and where the children of clergy in this land of workers and farmers, are refused permission to attend the secondary schools."

"We must remember," he declared, "the commandment to have pity on those who suffer, and bear in mind that no one has the right to force another into martyrdom."

Ecumenical Press Service

CORRESPONDENCE

The Secular Critics Dare

TO THE EDITORS: With most of what Tom Driver says about the ontological character of the moral question ("Dramatic Art and Public Morality," Oct. 31) I am in hearty agreement. But I do not believe he has grasped the full intent and significance of the criticism of contemporary literature that is made for the novel by Alfred Kazin as well as by Edmund Fuller, that is made for the theater by Mary McCarthy and Kenneth Tynan, as well as by Marya Mannes.

Let us focus on Tennessee Williams as the dramatist of decadence:

(a) He is a sensationalist in his exploitation of sex and of violence. There is plenty of both in the great tragedies of Shakespeare—love, lust, eye-gouging, child-stabbing, the stacking up of corpses. But the Shakespearean frame of reference saves it from sensationalism.

(b) He is an evangelist of evil. In *Cat On a Hot Tin Roof*, Big Daddy preaches the gospel of lust and of rapacity, and pours contempt on the hypocrities who pretend they have ideals. In O'Neill's *Desire Under the Elms* the main themes are also lust and rapacity; but O'Neill does not celebrate them and exalt them.

(c) He is the great apostle of self-pity. Remember Chance Wayne's plea in *Sweet Bird Of Youth* that we should recognize ourselves in him, and Marya Mannes' outraged rejoinder, "Not bloody likely!" In *The Iceman Cometh*, O'Neill also deals with defeat and with despair, but he does not turn maudlin with self-pity.

(d) His people too often are puppets. Kenneth Tynan commented on this in an article in *Holiday* magazine. A lot of the plays of Williams have to do with the drama of the foredoomed half-wit.

For the creative artist in literature, there are two fundamental questions involved:

(1) Can you write great novels or plays, or just significant ones, if the characters portrayed are incapable of love, of intelligence, and of free and responsible conduct? Certainly when these human functions are deleted, the material in which the artist works must be exceedingly limited in its possibilities. Yet that is the sort of material with which Williams prefers to work.

(2) If, as Mr. Driver proposes, we need a "theater that is not afraid of metaphysics," then the critic must dare to raise the question of truth and of reality. It was Mary McCarthy, as far back as *Streetcar Named Desire*, who declared that Williams is addicted to the lie—the embroidering lie. So today the final judgment must be simply that "the truth is not in him."

Just two more things need to be said.

Surely the artist is not so helpless about his metaphysical assumptions that he can take only what society offers him. Most societies, in any case, offer several possible sets of assumptions. Harbage has studied Shakespeare's choice of alternative moral assumptions in *Shakespeare and the Rival Traditions*. And many an artist has broken with the metaphysical assumptions of his time in order to pioneer a new perspective.

Finally I continue to be dumbfounded by the fact that, when I want a boldly ethical critique of contemporary literature, in the novel or in the theater, I have to turn to secular writers.—Kenneth Tynan, Donald Malcolm, Alfred Kazin, Mary McCarthy, Marya Mannes. They dare to say the things that ought to be said by the sophisticated Christian critic. The one sign of hope right now is that Mr. Driver increasingly—when he is not fighting the ghost of Puritanism, or trying to save the soul of Tennessee Williams—speaks with the same ethical incisiveness as do these others, and may even be willing to admit some day that he really belongs in their company.

ROBERT E. FITCH, Dean
Pacific School of Religion
Berkeley, Calif.

Reply to Professor Fitch's specific points would have to await a detailing of his criticisms. I will simply note here that there is evident in what he says an "all or nothing" attitude that obfuscates careful judgments. For instance:

(1) Suppose we admit that Tennessee Williams is sometimes a sensationalist (I have said so frequently). The question is, is he always that? Is he ever anything else? It would be unjust to say no.

(2) Is it to be maintained that in all of Williams' characters there is no love, no intelligence, no free and responsible conduct? It is too sweeping a judgment to say yes.

(3) When it comes to the critics, is it necessary for me to decide that I either do or do not belong in the company of Tynan, Malcolm, Kazin, McCarthy and Mannes? In the first place, are they all of one company? Professor Fitch finds them all ethically minded. What theater critics can he find who are not? In the second place, I prefer to be

with one or more of them when they are right and apart from them when they are wrong. It depends on the cases.

In short, what I wish for from Professor Fitch is more discriminate judgments—less buckshot and more rifle shot. If he took a more accurate aim at Williams, for instance, I think he might wound the fellow, but I doubt if he could shoot him dead through the heart.

T. F. D.

Obedience and Submission Not Absolute Values

TO THE EDITORS: Mr. Callahan's article ("Freedom and Authority in Roman Catholicism," Oct. 3) implies, though it does not clearly say as much, that the fundamental problem for the Christian community, Catholic and Protestant alike, is to determine the nature and structure of hierarchical authority and to weigh the values of ecclesiastical solidarity versus personal freedom.

In the political sphere, the author rightly notes that tension may exist for the Catholic when his respect for official directives runs against the conclusions of his own conscience. But this tension is only illustrated by the contemporary political dilemma of Catholic officeholders. Actually, it extends throughout the range of moral activity and, perhaps, even of certain doctrinal positions, and it is dishonest and/or moronic for the contemporary theologian to deal with peripheral problems of the Catholic officeholder until the authority that Christ gave his Church is determined from historical and empirical studies.

As a fellow-Catholic of Mr. Callahan's, I would like to note that I agree fully with his remarks that historical contexts, the fluid connotations of language, and the various levels of papal and conciliar pronouncements make significant and responsible obedience a difficult matter. What he does not sufficiently stress is that variations in Catholic teaching have existed in the past in extremely important moral areas. This can only mean that obedience to faulty conclusions of theologians during any epoch of moral theology's development can lead the loyal son of the Church into objectively immoral actions from which he can extricate himself only at the price of disobedience (such was the spiritual plight of Joan of Arc). If his conscience is in conflict with the Church's "teaching," he cannot be absolutely sure that he is in error and the theologians are right.

(The variations, reversals and contradictions in Catholic teaching on sexual morality in marriage are admitted even by Catholic historians: see Fr. Henry Davis, S. J., *Moral Principles and Practice*, and Fr. E. C. Messenger's *Two in One Flesh*; an excellent recent Protestant study in the same area is Sherwin Bailey's *The Man-Woman Relation in Christian Thought*.)

In brief, the values of obedience and submission are significant on several levels, but they are not absolute values and must be carefully weighed against the values of particular disobedient acts, as well as the general value of diversity and hetero-

doxy in the Church. It is incumbent not only on the Catholic politician but on all Catholics, in all matters, to think critically and responsibly about the conduct of their lives, neither underestimating the values of ecclesiastical solidarity and personal submission, nor expecting too much from the guidance of the Holy Spirit in the particular directives of ecclesiastical authorities, however "solemnly" and "universally" these directives are stated.

DAN SULLIVAN
Seine et 'Oise, France

Grass-Roots Catholicism

TO THE EDITORS: Come down out of the clouds and deal with the issues that are *really* at stake. I've been disturbed all through the election by the lack of relevancy in the *C and C* editorials. "What the Campaign Did to Religion" (Nov. 14) is cut from the same cloth.

The thing that has made me most concerned in the past election is the operation of grass-roots Catholicism. As a resident of Cleveland for 20 years and of Chicago for four years, I saw example upon example of how the Catholic Church operates in government when it has the opportunity. Job appointments in the Cleveland Post Office are controlled by the Catholic Bishop. I know—because I received my appointment through him. You know about the showing of *Martin Luther* in Chicago a few years back.

Mt. Carmel Hospital in Columbus somehow managed to become the [city's] most plush hospital... a few years ago through receiving the first government money given to Columbus hospitals—money that was supposed to be distributed to all

the hospitals. The abuse of Catholic power—and not vague ideals—is our concern.

(The Rev.) CHARLES L. HALE
Miami Avenue Presbyterian Church
Columbus, Ohio

Grass-Roots Protestantism

TO THE EDITORS: I want to thank you for the content of your publication during the recent election campaign, as it related to Christian belief and the candidates. You have helped me hold on to some faith in the Protestant Church in a part of the United States where I could find no help from ministers and little from friends.

The hate-literature circulated in rural Ohio, the failure of any minister to clarify the issue from the pulpit (so far as I could discern), the ridiculous but scandalous reports about Kennedy spread by church-going members of "Watch Washington," and, last but not least, the rationalizations offered by dozens of educated people (regularly attending members of "Christian" churches) for their vote against Kennedy when they voted for the Democratic candidate with regularity in preceding years, even through the Eisenhower campaigns—these things and more left me feeling that there was no hope for the Protestant Church in the world of today unless some new Luther came forward to lead us back to the life of Christ. I have never been so shaken...

MIRIAM SCOFIELD
Columbus, Ohio

"The Twelve Days of Christmas"

would make a formidable shopping list for anyone—what with turtledoves and partridges and pear trees. But you can give 24 days of Christmas by ordering Christmas gift subscriptions to *Christianity and Crisis* for one year (\$4.00) or six months (\$2.50). Your gift will be announced by an attractive card and includes a free paperbound copy of *Facing Protestant-Roman Catholic Tensions* to hang on the tree. Choose the rate that fits your gift list, and remember the reduced rates for additional gifts.

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CONTENTS

SOCIAL SYMBOL AND THE COMMUNICATION
OF THE GOSPEL AMOS N. WILDER
THE SOCIAL IRRELEVANCE OF THE LOCAL CHURCH
CAMERON P. HALL